

INFLUENCERS & CREATORS

LGBTQ+ Creators Weigh In on How Brands Can Prove Their Commitment to Advocacy

No one wants to feel like they're just ticking a box for a month



Influencers said they notice a surge in unpaid partnership requests during Pride Month. Emily Gracin, Landyn Pan, Banana Republic and Eric Hart Jr.




By Emmy Liederman

JUNE 9, 2022


Owin Pierson, a former youth pastor who still battles religious trauma, says the first place he truly felt accepted was on social media. When deciding what brand deals to pursue, he needs to feel confident that a partner will preserve the safe environment he has cultivated on his platform.

Pierson, who has an Instagram audience of well over 200,000 followers, is a member of the **LGBTQ+** and **AAPI** communities, in addition to being a **mental health** advocate. When sorting through business requests, he looks for partners that will support his intersectional identity.

Pierson found this in Tylenol, a brand he felt supports marginalized groups all year due to its participation in Johnson & Johnson's Care With Pride initiative, which raises money for nonprofit groups like **The Trevor Project** and Family Equality.



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254K followers



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Until all minority communities are represented and fully supported we are not all equal. [#CareWithPride](#) for supporting Asian Americans and the LGBTQ+ community all year long.

A big part of my identity that I've been able to reflect on and dive deeper into is being queer. I've struggled not seeing Queer or Asian representation in mainstream media but when I do see it, there's always been a lack of representation for just Asian-Americans. That's why I love [@Go_Laaunch](#) and all they do for Asian-American representation.

[#Tylenol](#) is providing grant funding to Go Laaunch in support of all the nonprofit organizations they support.

Some more information about the work Go Laaunch is doing:

Asian Americans are the fastest growing racial group in America, however, we have the highest levels of violence. Go Laaunch is the leading Asian American Status Index for sharing information about attitudes and stereotypes towards Asian Americans.

[@Go_Laaunch](#) exists to help improve the future for Asian Americans. Providing information, change and impact, Go Laaunch is one of the first studies in the last 20 years.

Grateful to be learning from so many on the team and been helping volunteer when I can on the side too. What I love most about Go Laaunch is its helping increase public awareness and help the public and government and community leaders advocate for AAPI equality.

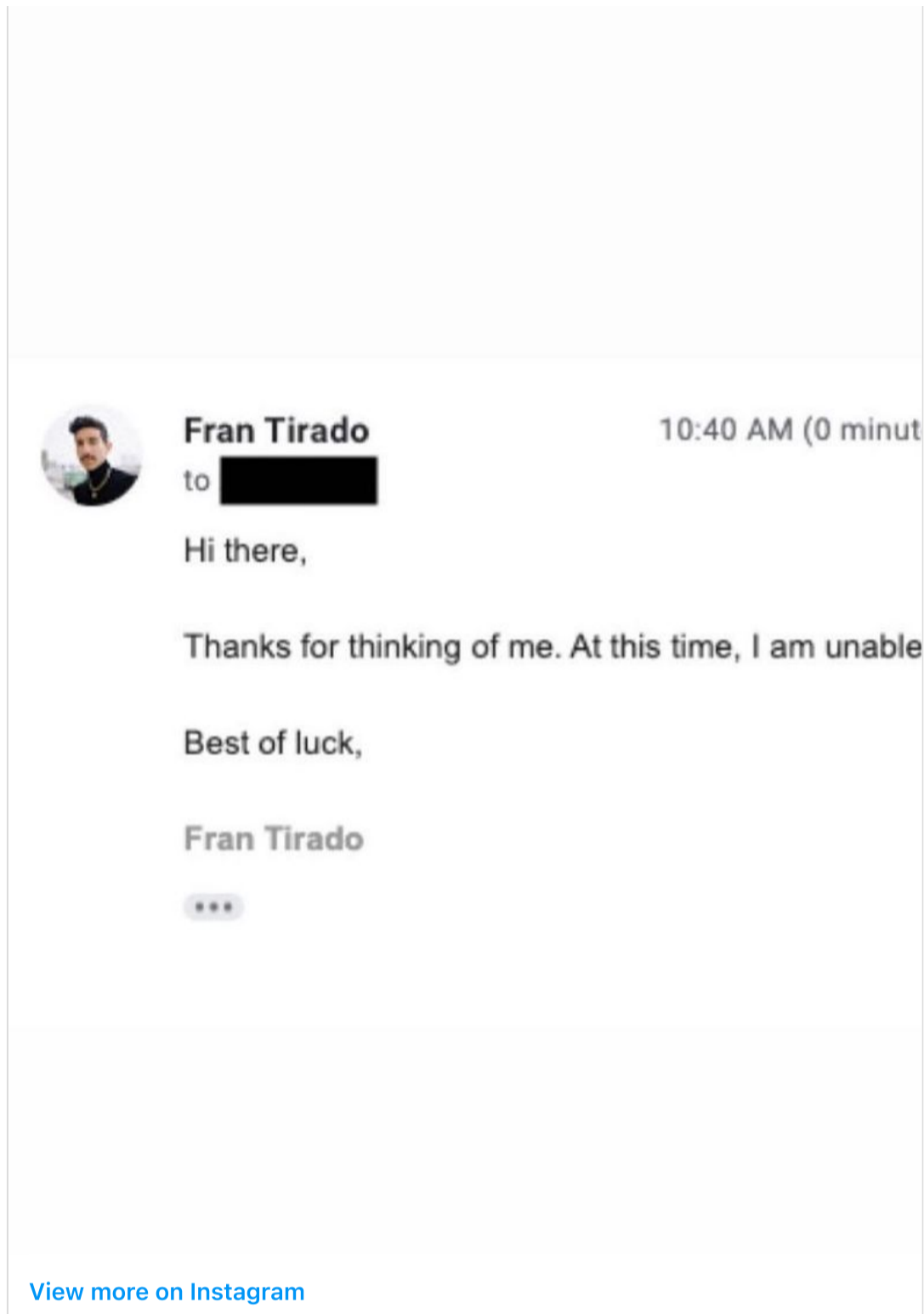
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Pierson noted that Tylenol is "very open to supporting the organizations [he] represents" since beginning their partnership, including donating to anti-discrimination group for the AAPI community Laaunch.

His perspective on brand deals is popular among other [LGBTQ+ creators](#), who believe partners need to prove they aren't running to cash a quick check during Pride Month. Many call out brands on social media for virtue signaling after they've tried to recruit LGBTQ+ talent for free in June.



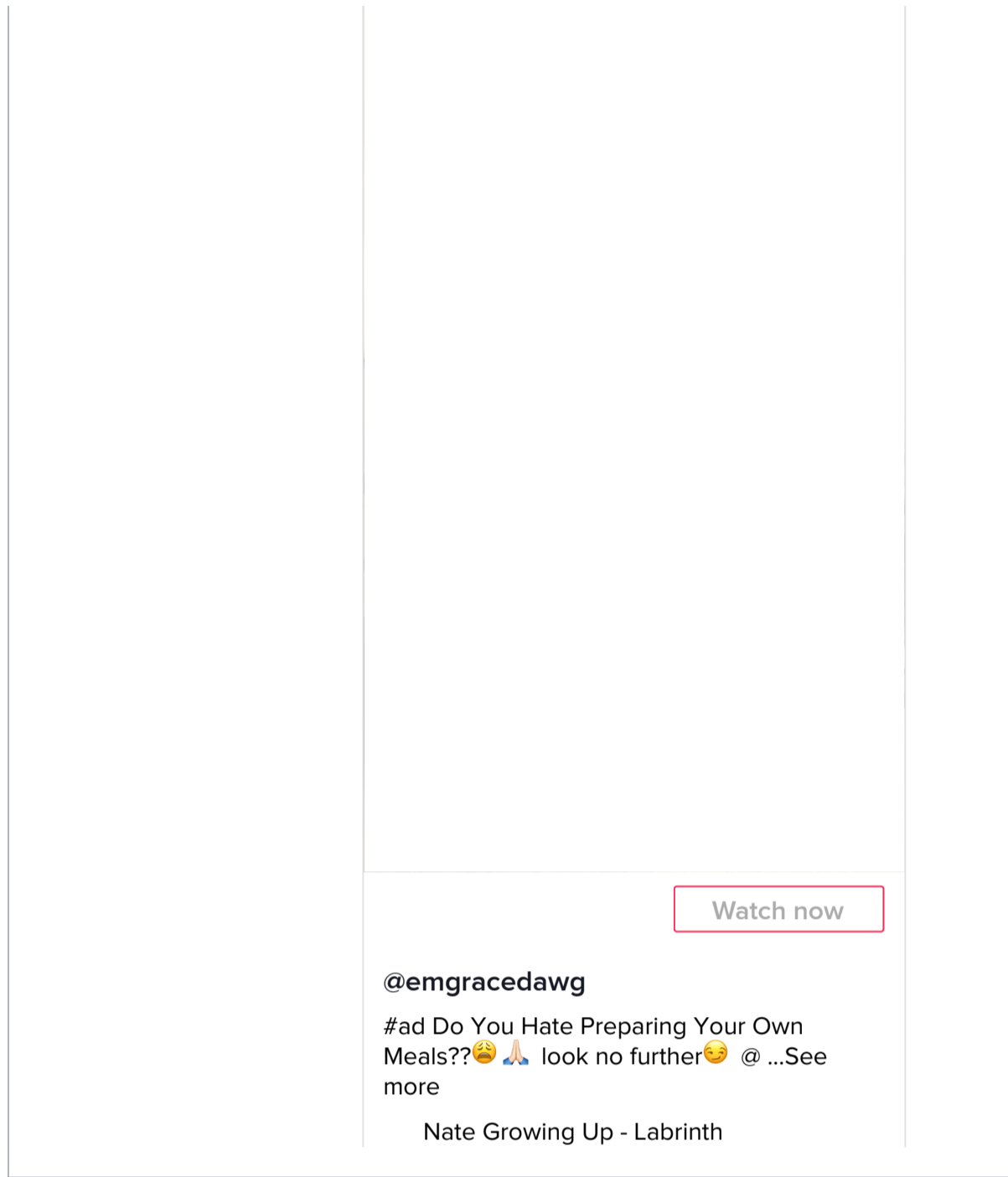
Creators want to see brands make a consistent, intentional effort to push the envelope, which can be done by including a variety of community members in messaging and campaigns to avoid tokenization. Through messages across online and offline platforms, it creates an opportunity for all consumers to see these inclusion efforts. Creators also expect partners to embrace intersectionality while respecting their creative liberties involved in crafting a campaign.

"I'm a big dyke and I'm bald, so there's no way a brand that I'm working with could be overtly homophobic," said creator [Emily Gracin](#), who has worked with brands including HelloFresh and [BetterHelp](#). "But they could be using me, which is why I try to do my research."

Reach the people who aren't listening

Gracin, who uses she/they pronouns, recognizes that when she posts content against abortion laws, for example, it will "most likely hit [TikTok's] For You page of people who agree with [her]." But every once in a while, her videos make their way onto the "other side" of TikTok, and the Los Angeles-based creator runs into people who hold opposing beliefs that she doesn't often encounter online or otherwise.





When it comes to doing more than tapping queer talent for partnerships, creators understand the importance of brands utilizing offline touch points to break away from social media audiences, which can sometimes exist as echo chambers. It's easy for messaging from brand partnerships to only exist on the side of social media that already supports the LGBTQ+ community, which is why creators are pushing for campaigns that reach people who aren't already listening or contributing to those causes.

Bruno Solari, associate vice president of PR company Autumn Communications, pointed to health care client Folx Health's recent out-of-home work. The brand placed billboards with messages like "Say gay," "Protect trans youth" and "Trans lives are precious" in major cities of states with anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, including Boise, Idaho; Des Moines, Iowa; Austin, Texas; and Nashville, Tenn.

"Brands are starting to be a lot more intentional in taking their campaigns 360 [degrees] beyond social media, and they have their eyes on the right people," he said.

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Avoid stereotypical tropes

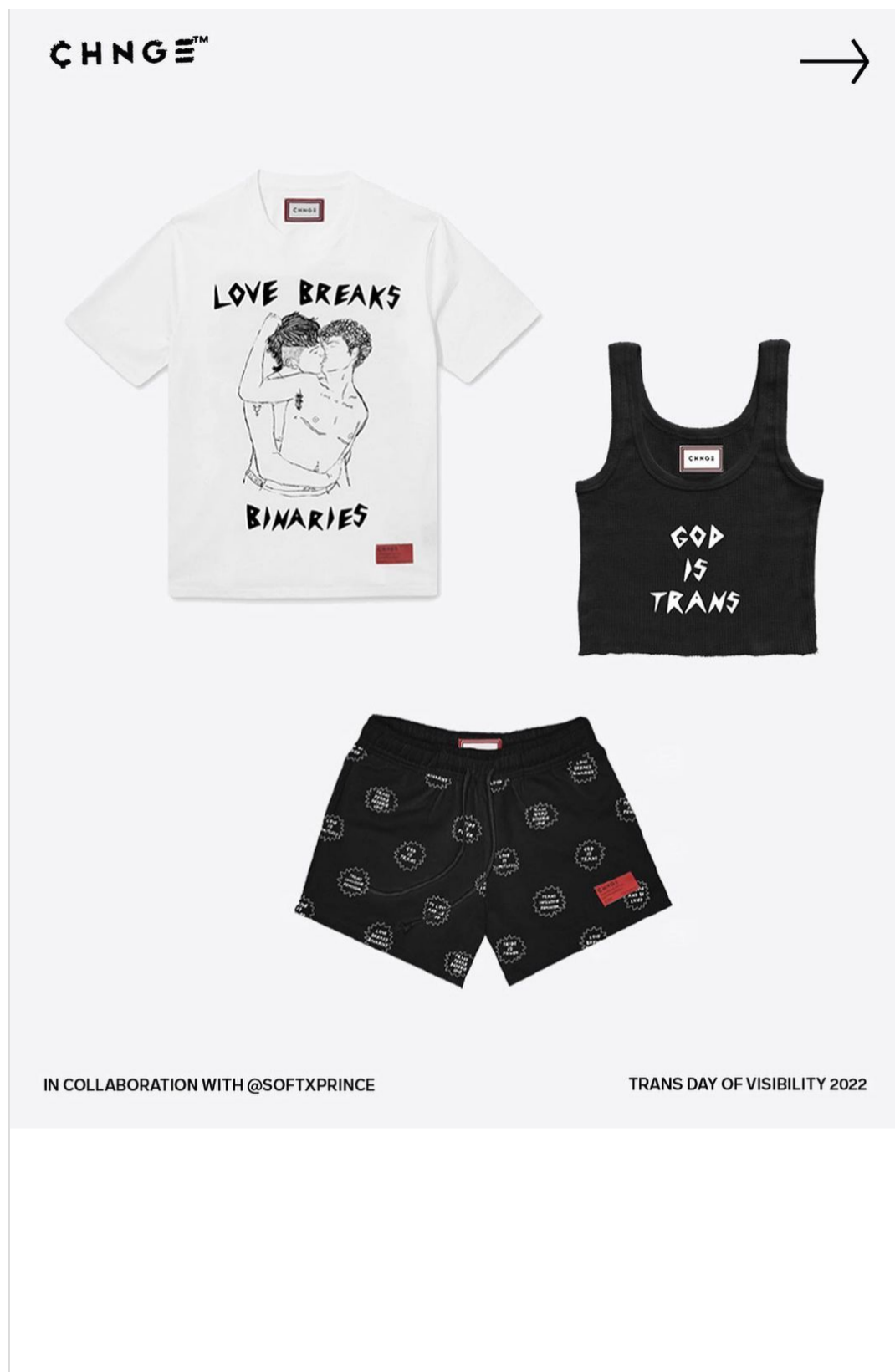
Marketers may have one idea in their head of what LGBTQ+ representation looks like, which creators say means they should widen their aperture to be more inclusive.

According to Gracin, brands must also keep in mind that physical presentation does not have to correlate with identity. When considering whether brands are practicing allyship throughout the year and not just in June, Gracin keeps in mind those brands may be hiring LGBTQ+ talent for ads without broadcasting inclusion, such as putting a cis-passing trans model or femme lesbian on a magazine cover.

"It's a double standard," Gracin said. "People want these brands to be inclusive, but not when someone doesn't fit their definition of gay." Rather than focusing so heavily on identity, brands should "highlight people because they're talented," she added.

Creator [Grayson Izekiel](#), who has worked with brands including gender-affirming hormone therapy app Plume and clothing line Chnge, cites having the worst experiences with "larger brands that really just want to meet a diversity quota." Izekiel stressed that these brand partners need to start making a real effort to amplify the vastness of identities and presentations across the LGBTQ+ community. This looks like making donations throughout the year, volunteering at organizations that support the community and consistently hiring LGBTQ+ talent.





"Brands are like 'Oh, we need trans people,' so they will get a ton of white trans mascs on board with little to no trans femmes or BIPOC,"

Izekiel, who uses they/them pronouns, said. "Larger brands that are 'allies' need to include a variety of queer and trans folks and value and pay us more for our work."



Let go of control

The greatest faux pas brands can make when working with creators like Izekiel is trying to control the creator's narrative to the point where the content feels forced. Creators agreed this is a red flag because it indicates the brand lacks respect for their work, and it's one reason they prefer to work with LGBTQ+-owned brands.

"I've had times where I'm expected to do a lot more work than I expected, with very short notice, and was just expected to keep cranking out different versions to their liking," Izekiel said. "In this same experience I was told that I would get a ton of creative liberty, but they ended up changing my artwork so much from the original ideas that I had."

Creator **Eric Hart Jr.**, who has worked with brands like Sprite and Samsung, does his research to make sure a partner isn't tapping him as "damage control for a mishap." On top of vetting a brand's track record, creators must feel confident that brand is "making an effort, as opposed to utilizing work and talent for [their] benefit," he said.

"Are brands putting forth dollars and supporting actual organizations, hiring and employing queer creatives, or are they using your experiences and identities for market gain?" Hart said. "It's about having constant communication and actually paying up."